Mt. Culmen Clarion

A Newsletter of Mt. Culmen EC Church

*"What I tell you in the dark, say in the light;
and what you hear whispered, shout from the rooftops!"*

Volume 6 - Issue 12 - December 2023

Pastor
Rev. Jonathan J. Brown
717-205-6532

Lay Delegate
Rebekah Brown

Alternate Lay Delegate
Kenneth Bannon

Board President
Floyd Mast

Board Vice President
Delrea Ream

Board Secretary
Sharon Mast

Church Treasurer
Esther Stauffer

Trustees:
Floyd Mast
Barry Ream
David Rissler
Ian Pammer

Stewards:
Esther Stauffer
Joyce Garber
Kim Sweigart
Brenna Pammer

Members-at-Large:
Sharon Mast
Delrea Ream

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The Heartbreak of Advent

– Rev. Jonathan Brown

I don't know about you, but if I'm being honest, the past couple months have been pretty tiring for me. Balancing going back to school, writing sermons, and other church and social obligations has been a strain. In Tolkien's classic book *The Fellowship of the Ring*, when one character says he's been feeling "like butter that has been scraped over too much bread," I understand – and maybe you do too. Maybe your life is always on the hectic side. Or maybe the approach of the holiday season, with shopping and family and other new obligations alongside your usual ones, is starting to add on the stress.

Speaking for myself, it can be difficult to get into the 'holiday spirit' when the stress gets intense. With so many things to distract us – *"fighting without and fear within,"* if the Apostle Paul will forgive me for borrowing the phrase – finding the Christmas in our hearts might not come easy. (That goes double if you've had a recent loss.)

That's a good reason to remind ourselves that it isn't Christmas yet. Oh, your neighbors will insist it's Christmas. They've got their lights and their inflatable snowmen, and who can even say what version of Santa will grace their house this year? But it isn't yet the Christmas season. This is pre-Christmas. This is Advent.

And you know what? That scraped-over-too-much-bread feeling may not be the classic Christmas spirit, but it sure suits the Advent spirit just fine! Because what is Advent, after all? Advent is a time of waiting... and waiting... and waiting. That doesn't mean a time where nothing happens. It might be that. Or it might be a time where *all too much* is happening – a time of wars and rumors of wars, a time of being tugged every which way, a time of feeling like a piñata at a kid's birthday party.

Advent connects back to the long, hard, dark, painful wait of Israel praying and praying, generation after generation, for God to send his Messiah – and in the meantime, pagans conquered and oppressed them, desecrated their temple; traitors schemed and ripped apart families; and countless men and women died with their prayers unheard (so it seemed). Only in the darkness of the grave, that chilly rest after a life of stress, would some of them at last meet the One for whom they'd been longing so long.

That's what Advent means. There's a reason it's historically been a time for Christians to fast and do penance. So if you're beset by stress and strife, if the gloomy winter chill is just too cold – embrace it. That's Advent. And Advent is a promise. Christmas is coming – in God's due time. If it finds you as it found Israel's righteous – tired, hurting, desperate, and hopeful – then it will find you just as Advent prepared you to be: ready.

Mount Culmen Evangelical Congregational Church
1885 Turkey Hill Road, East Earl, PA 17519
Sunday Morning Worship: 10:00 AM

Board Meeting Notes (November 2023)

Last month, the Official Board of Mt. Culmen Evangelical Congregational Church convened its meeting after the worship service on Sunday, November 5, 2023, so as to conduct the regular business of the church. In attendance at the meeting were 11 out of the 13 members of our church board: Floyd Mast, Sharon Mast, Del Ream, Barry Ream, Kim Sweigart, Dave Rissler, Esther Stauffer, Joyce Garber, Ken Bannon, Rev. Jonathan Brown, and Rebekah Brown. Also in attendance were church members Cindy Ruth and Debra Brubaker.

Opening with prayer and roll call, the board heard the customary reports.
Of these, the treasurer's report submitted by Esther Stauffer noted:

- October 2023 income of $7,263.54
  - Of this, $1,668.54 was from the yard sale, and $1,105 was a special donation in memory of Ray Snader
- October 2023 expenses of $4,847.68
- an October 31 ending balance of $9,193.97

The secretary's report was accepted unanimously on the motion of Kim Sweigart, seconded by Esther Stauffer.
The treasurer's report was accepted unanimously on the motion of Rebekah Brown, seconded by Ken Bannon.

The stewards scheduled their annual compensation meeting with Pastor Jonathan for Sunday, November 12, 2023.

The trustees reported that they had replaced the exterior light above the fellowship hall main doors.

Under the heading of old business, the board first returned to the topic of lawn care. Esther presented a quote she had received from Nicole's Landscaping, in which each treatment would cost approximately $700. Some members of the board demurred at the price; others acknowledged the heavy cost, but suggested that the beautification of the church property would be worth it, and help is hard to come by. Kenny reported he was still awaiting a promised quote from Operation Green Lawn, while Esther said she had not yet received updated prices from TruGreen as of the time of the meeting. (*N.B.: These have since arrived.*) Further discussion ensued about the tattered state of the plastic beneath the roadside mulch. Floyd reported having had difficulty planting the bleeding-heart plants because of it, while Barry described it as ineffective at its purpose of preventing weeds: pull as many as we can, they return in just two short weeks. Esther said that the sheet had more or less disintegrated, and that she may have a roll of replacement material, but the original tattered plastic would need to be dug out.

Pastor Jonathan then suggested that, just like the church board had held a debrief after the October 22 yard sale/soup sale, it would be a good idea to do that again. For instance, last year, there had been a suggestion that we consider moving this fall event to September, due to conflicts with other local events in October. However, the board agreed now that October was better: our problem this year wasn't the date, and several key personnel (e.g., Esther) would have much bigger scheduling conflicts in September than in October.

Pastor Jonathan next observed that last November, one of our biggest recommendations to ourselves was to invest in better signs and make sure we have them out. The board had laid plans to purchase better signs and place one in front of the church building at least a month in advance. This year, however, signs didn't appear to go out even one whole week before our sale. Cindy Ruth chimed in that the church's neighbor has a sign for her yard sales that fits a lot of information on it, and which stands out so that people can see it. Esther noted that as far as our event signage goes now, the problem is that it is limited to advertising events “today,” not farther in advance than that.

Pastor Jonathan next said that the biggest obstacle for this year's sale was the miserable weather, with heavy winds and strong rains for most of the event's duration. While the weather itself isn't something the board can vote to make better (if only!), some had wondered if it wouldn't have made sense to have a rain date. In discussion, others on the board pointed out that, with an event that crafters come to, rain dates would be tricky to make work, since they have to plan to be there on that specific day. So, by consensus, the board decided not to pursue a rain date policy.

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Another issue that came up this year, Pastor Jonathan said, was that the pavilion became very dark (in large part due to the overcast skies), and since we usually had relied on Floyd's big extension cord that he brings from home, and he wasn't able to be present, Dave, Barry, and Pastor Jonathan had had to cobble together a series of extension cords across the parking lot to the pavilion. To save us the trouble in the future, Pastor Jonathan had bought and donated a 200-foot outdoor extension cord to the church, which is stored at the church now. Several trustees expressed thanks.

In relation to this, Pastor Jonathan noted that, in searching for extension cords in the shed, it became inconvenient to have only one shed key available. Esther said that she would get a few more copies made.

Finishing up the debrief, Pastor Jonathan observed that in 2022, one issue that came up was how quickly chicken corn noodle soup sold out. This year, the soups sold at a more even pace, so even people who came later to the event had a wider range of soups to pick from. Also, in 2022, Barry Ream had suggested adding hot dogs to the menu. It proved to be a great idea, because we sold all thirty of our hot dogs, and could have sold more if we had had more. Finally, Barry expressed thanks to Cindy Ruth and Dave Rissler for their large roles in making the event a success. Cindy replied that it was a fun experience.

In one last item of old business, Pastor Jonathan noted that Rebekah Brown was busily working on the new church directories, with a plan to have them finished and distributed on the Sunday after Thanksgiving; and that he and she also wished to review the church mailboxes and update the names in light of the new directory. They requested that the board give official approval to this plan. Del Ream made a motion to that effect, which Kim Sweigart seconded; it passed unanimously. (*N.B.: All of this happened, and only one swap of a mailbox was found necessary.*)

Under the heading of <u>new business</u>, the board had several other items of business and information. Del noted that Debra Brubaker had inquired if the church might be willing to sell or rent her the piano from the fellowship hall, as she was hoping to take some piano lessons. This met with widespread approval, and Barry Ream made a motion to let her have it for free; Kim Sweigart seconded the motion. Debra then clarified that it was something she would want to run past her husband, and that it might make more sense to keep it at the fellowship hall but practice there. So the board agreed by consensus that this was a good plan.

Next, Esther reported on the church's certificate of deposit we have at the Bank of Bird-in-Hand, as she had received notice that it's term was about to expire/renew. She shared with the church that the current interest rate is 5.27%, which is fairly good. It was to reach maturity on November 21, so she wanted the board's direction on what she should say when she calls the bank on November 22. Rebekah pointed out that, if we want to move ahead with our long-planned HVAC renovations to the fellowship hall this coming year, we might find it convenient to have those funds available, i.e., not locked up in a certificate of deposit. This led to a brief discussion of the estimated costs of those renovations (by now, over $8000). There followed also a discussion of the penalties from the bank if we were to withdraw a portion of those deposited funds early: it would cost six months' worth of interest on the amount withdrawn. Del expressed the view that we should renew the certificate of deposit, since she was confident that a fundraiser would allow us to raise the money for the renovations. She made a motion to this effect, which was seconded by Barry Ream and then passed unanimously.

Pastor Jonathan noted that, by the time of the December board meeting, it would be the church season of Advent, before which we always decorate the church. Since Advent begins later than usual this year, he made a motion to set our decoration day for Saturday, December 2, immediately before the first Sunday of Advent. Esther seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Related to that, Pastor Jonathan noted that our church customarily has a poinsettia garden, and that the order forms had been distributed before the board meeting, to be due back November 19. He recalled that last year, Abby Eberly had asked for poinsettias not to be placed beneath the altar, because it interferes with running cords to a CD player for the cantata. The board agreed to take that into consideration, but hoped that if the CD player were plugged in before the poinsettias arrived, it would remove the conflict.

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Next, Pastor Jonathan observed that, with Advent fast approaching, it was time to look forward to our customary Advent candle lighting and Advent readings. Last year, Pastor Jonathan had redone the readings, and planned to just slightly abridge them this year, but otherwise keep them basically the same. He also asked the board to help look for volunteers. The Reams and the Masts said that they, as couples, would take two of the Sundays of Advent, leaving them to be scheduled and the other two Sundays to be filled.

As an informational item, Pastor Jonathan also reported that, as he and Rebekah were reorganizing their home, they had decided they weren't using a mini-fridge they had, so they had brought it to the church basement. The reason, he said, was that some of our church members (and perhaps some future church visitors) are diabetic, and so in case of a hypoglycemic emergency, he had filled the mini-fridge with small cans of soda and a tube of cake decorator icing gel (though neither is a perfect substitute for glucagon). For church work days and other occasions, he had also put some small bottled waters in the mini-fridge. Floyd Mast and others expressed thanks.

Esther Stauffer brought the next two items, saying that as the temperature outside drops, it was soon coming time to remove the air conditioner units from the fellowship hall windows. She asked to check with Ian Pammer to see when he might be free to help. Further, she asked whether we ordinarily would hand out candy and oranges – is it at the cantata, or the following Sunday? The board agreed by consensus that it is the Sunday of the cantata. Esther also noted several upcoming dates for which the fellowship hall had been rented out.

Ken Bannon posed a question about the EC Investment Fund, and Esther reported that from our money invested with the EC Church, we receive $31.25 in interest twice per year.

Lastly, Pastor Jonathan offered the board more informational items about future business. He reminded the board that the December board meeting is designated the 'Annual Board Meeting,' which by our bylaws is invested with the responsibilities that used to fall to the Local Conference. As 'the highest judicial or legislative meeting of the Board,' it examines the church's membership (and puts members on trial, if need be), would accept the apportionments of National Conference, can recommend people as candidates for ministry, and is where stewards and lay delegates are elected. Pastor Jonathan noted that two stewards (Joyce Garber and Esther Stauffer) would have their terms expiring in December. Likewise, lay delegate Rebekah Brown and alternate lay delegate Ken Bannon would have their terms expire at the same time. Elections will address all those vacancies, though each is eligible for re-election.

The Annual Board Meeting must also schedule the Annual Congregational Meeting for late January 2024. At that time, two trustees (Dave Rissler and Ian Pammer) will have their terms expiring. So will our two members-at-large (Sharon Mast and Del Ream). Following that, the February board meeting is when the board must reorganize itself, on an annual basis, by electing a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer again. Rather than be caught off-guard by what's happening when and to whom, Pastor Jonathan encouraged the board to be prepared for all of these upcoming elections.

There being no further business after that, on motion of Barry Ream, as seconded by Kim Sweigart, the board adjourned its meeting, to reconvene following the worship service on **Sunday, December 3, 2023**.

Statistical Report (October 2023)

	Worship Service Attendance	Offerings Received
10/01/23	26	$1,440.00
10/08/23	26	$445.00
10/15/23	25	$780.00
10/22/23	29	$895.00
10/29/23	24	$735.00
Average:	26	Total: $4,295.00

Last month, from November 27 to December 1, Esther Stauffer and Cindy Hoffer traveled down to Boone, North Carolina, to volunteer for Samaritan's Purse in the next step of Operation Christmas Child. Enjoy this glimpse at the insides of the ministry operation that spreads Christmas joy to children around the world!

For there is born to you this day
in the city of David a Savior
who is Christ the Lord.
LUKE 2:11
Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!
2 CORINTHIANS 9:15

Birthdays (December 2023)			Anniversaries (December 2023)
12/2 – Ken Styer	12/2 – Martha Stoltzfus	12/2 – Melissa Karol	12/16 – Floyd and Sharon Mast
12/6 – Randy Stoltzfus	12/17 – Leon Hess	12/20 – Butch Hoshauer	12/21 – Lindsy Ringler
12/22 – Wesley Kern (Barb's son)	12/28 – Shirley Good	12/29 – Veanna Baxter	12/31 – Barry Ream

At the very start of this month, on Saturday, December 2, 2023, those of us who were able to do so gathered at Mt. Culmen EC Church to decorate the interior for the Advent and Christmas seasons.

Thank you to Yvonne Styer, Esther Stauffer, Sharon Mast, Rebekah Brown, Pastor Jonathan Brown, and everyone else at Mt. Culmen.
Everyone, please enjoy the bright and festive look of our church building!
The people (you!) are the church, but the building is a visible sign of the spiritual reality of who we are.

Upcoming Church Events

- **Christmas Cantata** – On Sunday, **December 17**, 2023, be here (and bring a friend) for our annual Christmas cantata! Mt. Culmen's choir has been practicing diligently, and they'll present this year's cantata program during our Sunday worship service at its usual 10:00am time. The program this year is "The First Noel: Celebrating the Birthday of a King," a cantata arranged by Russell Mauldin with narrations written by Sue C. Smith. Combining traditional carols (bet you can guess at least one of them) with newer songs, our choir's cantata is all set to lead you deeper into the awe of Christmas.

Upcoming Community Events

- **Christmas in the Park** – From Friday through Sunday, **December 1-3** and **December 8-10**, 2023, Terre Hill Park (210 Lancaster Avenue, Terre Hill) will, from 5:00pm to 8:30pm each night, hold Christmas in the Park, complete with food, lights, activities, entertainment, and vendors.
- **Live Nativity and Hymn Sing** – On Monday, **December 4**, 2023, at 7:00pm, the Garden Spot Village chapel (433 South Kinzer Avenue, New Holland) welcomes us for a live nativity and a hymn sing.
- **Advent Concert** – On Wednesday, **December 6**, 2023, at 7:00pm, Our Mother of Perpetual Help Catholic Church (320 Church Avenue, Ephrata) will host the "Comfort and Joy" Advent concert performed by Steve Angrisano and Sarah Hart. No tickets required. A free-will offering will be taken.
- **Christmas at the Ironmasters** – At Historic Poole Forge (1940 Main Street, Narvon), a special event will take place on Friday, **December 8** (4pm-8pm), Saturday, **December 9** (12pm-8pm), and Sunday, **December 10** (12pm-6pm). Expect a Christmas village marketplace, festive bonfires and caroling, other live music, homemade refreshments, decorations, and so much more. Entry is $10/adult, or $15/two.
- **Journey to Bethlehem** – Up at Woodcrest Retreat (225 Woodcrest Drive, Ephrata), on Friday, **December 8** (6:00pm-8:30pm), Saturday, **December 9** (5:00pm-8:30pm), Friday, **December 15** (6:00pm-8:30pm), and Saturday, **December 16** (5:30pm-8:30pm), a live journey through the wilderness to a live nativity scene will allow you to get a living experience of the journey Mary and Joseph took. The cost is $10.00.
- **Holiday Shopping Bazaar** – On Saturday, **December 9**, 2023, Garden Spot Fire & Rescue (339 East Main Street, New Holland) will host a holiday shopping bazaar from 9:00am to 1:00pm – a great chance to finish that last-minute Christmas gift shopping, thanks to more than thirty crafters and vendors!
- **Lancaster Meistersingers** – On Sunday, **December 10**, 2023, at 7:00pm, Garden Spot Village chapel will host a concert by a local Mennonite singing team, the Lancaster Meistersingers, who will perform classical and sacred Christmas music. An offering will be taken to support the ministry of Helping Hands and Hearts.
- **Vivace Strings and Voices** – On Saturday, **December 16**, 2023, at 7:00pm, the Garden Spot Village chapel will host a seasonal concert by the Vivace Ensemble: Strings, Chimes, and Voices. Donations, accepted at the door, will assist the Garden Spot Village Benevolent Fund.
- **Community Meal** – On Monday, **December 18**, 2023, from 5:30pm to 6:30pm, CrossNet Ministries will provide a free community meal at their youth center (110 West Franklin Street, New Holland).
- **Christmas Eve Services** – The following are just a few of the area churches with Christmas Eve services on Sunday, **December 24**, 2023. We encourage you to attend a Christmas Eve service!
  - Garden Spot Village Chapel (433 South Kinzer Avenue, New Holland) – 3:00pm
  - First Baptist Church (149 West Conestoga Street, New Holland) – 4:00pm
  - Church of Saint Benedict (2020 Chestnut Hill Road, Mohnton) – 4:00pm, 6:00pm, 10:00pm
  - Weaverland Anabaptist Faith Community (210 Weaverland Valley Road, East Earl) – 4:30pm
  - Bethany Grace Fellowship (400 Reading Road, East Earl) – 4:30pm, 6:30pm
  - Cornerstone Bible Church (529 Lauschtown Road, Denver) – 6:00pm
  - Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church (150 Water Street, New Holland) – 6:00pm, 10:00pm (w/ choir)
  - St. Paul's United Church of Christ (133 Church Street, Bowmansville) – 7:00pm
  - Saint Stephen Reformed Church (249 East Main Street, New Holland) – 7:00pm
  - Trinity Lutheran Church (221 East Main Street, New Holland) – 8:00pm
- **Messiah Sing-a-long** – On Friday, **December 29**, 2023, at 7:00pm, at Upper Octorara Presbyterian Church (1121 Octorara Trail, Parkesburg), will host a sing-along performance of Handel's famed oratorio *Messiah*.

Featured Hymn: "The First Noel"

Original Lyrics from First Publication

1. The first Nowel that the Angel did say
Was to certain poor Shepherds in fields where they lay;
In fields where they lay, keeping their sheep,
In a cold Winter's night that was so deep.

Chorus
Nowel, Nowel, Nowel, Nowel,
Born is the King of Israel.

2. They looked up and saw a Star
Shining in the East beyond them far,
And to the earth it gave great light,
And so it continued both day and night.
Nowel, Nowel, &c.

3. And by the lightning of that Star
There came three Wise Men from countries far,
To seek a King was their intent,
And to follow the Star wheresoever it went.
Nowel, Nowel, &c.

4. This Star drew nigh to the North West,
And at Bethlehem Jury she took up her rest,
And there she did both stop and stay,
Right over the house where the King did lay.
Nowel, Nowel, &c.

5. They did they know assuredly
Within that house the King did lie;
Then entered in one for to see,
And found the Babe in poverty.
Nowel, Nowel, &c.

6. Then entered in these Wise Men three,
Most reverently upon their knee,
And offered there in his presence
Both gold, and myrrh, and frankincense.
Nowel, Nowel, &c.

7. Between an ox-stall and an ass
This Child truly there born was;
For want of clothing there did him lay
All in an ox-manger amongst the hay.
Nowel, Nowel, &c.

8. Now let us all with one accord
Sing praises to our Heavenly Lord,
The which hath made Heaven and Earth of nought,
And by his blood Mankind hath bought.
Nowel, Nowel, &c.

9. If we in our life-time do well,
We shall be free from the pains of Hell,
For God hath prepared and for us all
A resting-place in generall.
Nowel, Nowel, Nowel, Nowel,
Born is the King of Israel.

Original text taken from Davies Gilbert,
Some Ancient Christmas Carols, with the Tunes to Which They Were Formerly Sung in the West of England. Together with Two Ancient Ballads, A Dialogue, &c. 2nd ed.
(London: John Nicholas and Son, 1823), 28-29.

Appears in *The Singing Church* as hymn #94 (using verses 1-4, 6, 8).

Commentary from Pastor Jonathan

"The First Noel" wasn't written by a politician, but we might not have it without one. On Friday, March 6, 1767, an English pastor named Rev. Edward Giddy and his wife Catherine (maiden name Davies) welcomed a son, to whom they gave his mother's maiden name as a first name: Davies Giddy. Edward was the Anglican rector in a little village called St Erth, in the western English county of Cornwall. He and Catherine had married in March 1765. Davies was their second son; their first son, also named Davies, was born and died in June 1766. Davies #2, though, had a longer future ahead of him, and he was baptized ten weeks after his birth, on Friday, May 15, 1767. Two years later, he gained a little sister, Mary Philippa Davies Giddy, in 1769.

In 1775, the Giddy family moved briefly seven miles westward to the Cornish port town Penzance, where Davies was enrolled in a grammar school overseen by Rev. James Parken. But a few years later, Catherine's father John died, leaving the Giddys his estate and farmhouse, a place not far southwest of St Erth called Tredrea. There, Davies' father Edward tutored him, with help from a local astronomer named Rev. Malachy Hitchens, the vicar of the church in the western Cornish village of St Hilary, just a few miles south of St Erth.

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Even as a boy, Davies had been interested in math and science – he was obsessed with algebra – so in 1782, Edward sent him for three years at a Mathematical Academy run by the mathematician Benjamin Donne. Davies didn't find it as helpful as he might have liked: Donne "continued to throw away my time," Davies complained. In April 1785, Davies – now 18 years old – enrolled in Pembroke College, one of the constituent colleges of Oxford University. He couldn't quite escape family, though. His father then enrolled in a graduate program there, on pretense of advancing his education, but really as a pretext to move in with Davies and keep supervising him. Edward's rather overbearing influence on Davies made him both deeply dutiful and somewhat mistrusting of people. Yet Davies was an excellent student, and even in his early twenties, he got the nickname "the Cornish Philosopher." He became a favored student and eventually close friend with the new chemistry professor, Thomas Beddoes, soon to become a medical reformer and science writer. The two of them shared a penchant for innovative new ideas and revolutionary politics.

As the French Revolution got underway across the English Channel, Davies graduated from Pembroke at the end of June 1789 with a Master of Arts degree, which came with an honorary Bachelor of Civil Law degree as well. Going back to Tredrea, he began working as an engineer, and by November 1791, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of London for the Improvement of Natural Knowledge – a very prestigious scientific group. In nominating him in May 1791, they'd described Davies as "a gentleman devoted to mathematical and philosophical pursuits."

A couple months later, through the advocacy of the local Cornish political patron Sir Francis Basset, Davies was appointed by the Duke of Cornall (the future King George IV) as 1792's High Sheriff of Cornwall, a task he carried out with (of course) his father's support. In light of the French Revolution, this was part of a broader strategy to sort of 'domesticate' higher-class radicals by getting them invested in the existing political arrangements. In Davies' case, it made him the one responsible for quelling riots by hungry workers who were paid too pitifully to afford food.

Davies' time as High Sheriff closed in January 1793, but he remained one of the only magistrates in Cornwall, not to mention some responsibility for the family farmland and, soon, a role as a deputy lieutenant in the Cornwall militia. Through the 1790s, he helped several other Cornish engineers invent more efficient steam engines; and when he was introduced to a budding young Cornish chemist named Humphrey Davy, Davies mentored him. (Humphrey went on to discover several new elements, invent new kinds of lamps, and coin the term 'laughing gas.')

When Davies' mother Catherine died in 1803, he took on new responsibility for Tredrea. The following year, he got more deeply into politics. Prior to reforms, major landowners could easily arrange the outcome of local elections, so Sir Christopher Hawkins arranged for Davies Giddy to be unanimously elected to Parliament's House of Commons as the representative of Helston. But in 1806, Hawkins sold off the seat to the highest bidder. Sir Francis Basset got Davies a new seat, representing Bodmin – a role he held until 1832.

Davies was not only a zealous advocate of County Cornwall, he was involved in a wide assortment of committees and active on a range of domestic policy issues. Some of those might strike us as a bit strange. For instance, in 1807 he opposed better schools, thinking it would be dangerous for the lower class to learn how to read. (He worried, among other things, that they'd just read "seditious books, vicious pamphlets, and publications against Christianity," and so be corrupted by their exposure to such ideas through reading.) But, in retrospect, people said that Davies was "the encourager and indefatigable supporter of every measure connected with the advancement of science."

On Easter Monday, April 18, 1808, in addition to attending a session of Parliament, Mr. Davies Giddy, Esq., had one more bit of business for the day: he got married. Mary Ann Gilbert was about nine years his junior, 31 or 32 to Davies' 41, but she was passionate about the situation of the rural poor and the need for more productive farming techniques. Her father's death when she was six had left their family impoverished, but her mother (who'd now died in 1807) had been determined to secure a better life for her daughter. Mary had thus become close with her wealthy but childless uncle Charles Gilbert, who owned the East Sussex seaside estate Eastbourne (now a national park). No wonder that, in the newspaper's announcement of Davies marrying Mary Ann, it described her as "Miss Gilbert of Essex, a lady of great accomplishments, possessing a very large fortune, with a much larger in expectancy." Their wedding was officiated by Davies' own father Rev. Edward Giddy.

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(Continued from Page 9, "Featured Hymn")

They were living at their London property – often a necessity of Davies' Parliamentary career – when Mary Ann had their first child: a daughter, Mary Giddy, born on Valentine's Day 1809, privately baptized nearly four months later, and brought to the family's parish church (St. Mary's Church in Eastbourne) at the end of June. A year later, they had a son, Charles Davies Gilbert, in mid-April 1810 – no doubt he was named for Mary Ann's loving uncle – and waited less than a month to have him baptized. Even as a statesman and new father of two, though, Davies found time to help scientific colleagues run experiments: that June, he helped develop a way to accurately measure wool filaments.

Around this time, one of the hot-button politician issues was the "bullionist debate," over whether the government should resume allowing people to demand gold in exchange for their paper money at any time. Parliament formed a committee, and amidst the heated debates of 1811, Davies published his *Plain Statement on the Bullion Question*, taking a middle position that they should reduce the amount of paper money in circulation until it matched the value of the United Kingdom's gold reserves. Later that year, in December 1811, Mary Ann gave birth to another child, John Davies Giddy, whom they had baptized on New Year's Day 1812. John's first year was a tumultuous one. His father Davies, even while retaining a reputation as a defender of the poor, had to argue against democratic reforms, legal rights for Catholics, and call for "the most prompt measures" in suppressing the Luddite riots (workers who felt threatened by the new technologies of the Industrial Revolution, among other things). Not only that, but by the end of the year, the United Kingdom was at war against a country overseas called the United States of America.

While the war was going on, Davies increased his family some more – their daughter Catherine was born in London in April 1813 and baptized in Eastbourne a month and a half later. But the day of Catherine's baptism was the day of her brother Charles' funeral; he had died, only three years old, leaving Davies crushed and depressed. This wasn't helped, either, by his father Edward's increasingly worsening health. In the midst of his personal woes, Davies was honored in February 1814 when he was invited to be the first president of the newly-founded Royal Geological Society of Cornwall. Less than a month into the role, Edward died – on Davies' 47th birthday.

The following year (1815), Davies' London house coming under attack by "a few disorderly persons, chiefly boys," who threw bricks through his windows, evidently in retaliation of his support for the Corn Bill which blocked the import of cheaper grains from abroad. Eleven months later, in February 1816, Mary Ann's uncle Charles died. His only two heirs listed in his will were his sister Susannah (who died a month later, before the will was proved) and Mary Ann herself: he left nearly everything "to Mary Ann Giddy, wife of Davies Giddy, and her heirs provided they have taken the name of Gilbert." Charles was concerned about the family name dying out. By this point, Mary Ann was pregnant again – she gave birth to another daughter, Mary Susannah (no doubt named in honor of Mary Ann's late aunt), in April 1816, having her baptized two months later in June. As the year drew to a close, Davies made a big decision: he changed not only the children's last names, but his own as well, to Gilbert.

The Gilbert family was a growing one: they had another daughter, Ann, born in April 1817 and baptized that July, and then a final daughter, Hester Elizabeth Gilbert, born the day after Christmas 1818 and baptized, whatever the cause of the delay, in July 1820. In between that time, Davies – with a son and five daughters – kept busy. Drawing on his engineering background, he personally designed a new ventilation system for the House of Commons; he became the new treasurer for the Royal Society; and he advocated for building an astronomical observatory at the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa. (They did, and several important discoveries were later made from there.) In 1821, he advised the renowned engineer Thomas Telford on his designs for the world's first suspension bridge.

But politics, engineering, science, and multiplying weren't the only things on Davies Gilbert's mind. He still cared deeply about Cornwall and its distinctive culture and history. So he had taken upon himself a mission to collect it, and in 1822 this turned into a very important book: a collection of the songs sung throughout Cornwall and other parts of western England at Christmas, many of which had been passed down by oral tradition but never published before Davies decided to do it. So he published *Some Ancient Christmas Carols, with the Tunes to Which They Were Formerly Sung in the West of England* – eight of them in all. It was just the beginning of his great labor of love to Cornwall's musical and religious heritage, as would later become clear.

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Davies Gilbert prefaced this 1822 book of "ancient Christmas carols" by writing the following paragraphs:

> The following Carols or Christmas Songs were chanted to the tunes accompanying them, in churches on Christmas Day, and in private houses on Christmas Eve, throughout the West of England, up to the latter part of the late century. The Editor is desirous of preserving them in their actual forms, however distorted by false grammar or by obscurities, as specimens of times now passed away, and of religious feelings superseded by others of a different cast. He is anxious also to preserve them on account of the delight they afforded him in his childhood, when the festivities of Christmas Eve were anticipated by many days of preparation, and prolonged through several weeks by repetitions and remembrances.
>
> Christmas Day, like every other great festival, has prefixed to it in the calendar a vigil or fast; and in Catholic countries, Mass is still celebrated at midnight after Christmas Eve, when austerities cease, and rejoicings of all kinds succeed. Shadows of these customs were, till very lately, preserved in the Protestant West of England. The day of Christmas Eve was passed in an ordinary manner; but at seven or eight o'clock in the evening, cakes were drawn hot from the oven; cider or beer exhilarated the spirits in every house; and the singing of Carols was continued late into the night. On Christmas Day, these Carols took the place of Psalms in all the churches, especially at afternoon service, the whole congregation joining; and at the end, it was usual for the parish clerk to declare, in a loud voice, his wishes for a merry Christmas and a happy new year to all the parishioners....

Although this little book contained just eight carols, it was much more popular than Gilbert expected. The following year (1823), he published an expanded edition of twenty carols plus a few ballads and dialogues as a bonus. The way he described the Cornish Christmas singing was true to life. Davies' brother-in-law wrote in 1815 what it was like to spend Christmas at Tredrea with Davies and his family: how they "spent our Christmas Eve here in the old country way," where "the amusement is singing Christmas carrolls – which, tho' the ballad is not worth much, are set to very pleasant tunes and were very well sung by our party." Since the 1823 edition of Davies' carol book was the first publication of "The First Noel," maybe that's one of the songs they were singing at Tredrea eight years earlier.

In the meantime between the first and second editions of his book, Davies continued working for science: he used his position in Parliamentary committees to secure funding for an inventor named Charles Babbage, who'd invented what he called a 'difference engine' – the world's first mechanical computer. Three years later, in February 1826, Davies' family began to shrink: his eldest child, his daughter Mary, died, just three days short of her 17th birthday. In that same year, in addition to another paper "On the Mathematical Theory of Suspension Bridges," Davies edited and published a medieval Cornish poem about Jesus Christ and his crucifixion, plus the text of Genesis 1 in Cornish. (Cornish as a language had only gone extinct in Davies' youth; he wanted to preserve what could still be saved.)

The following year, 1827, Davies ascended to the highest honor, succeeding Humphrey Davy (remember him) in the role of president of the Royal Society – a position held just over a hundred years earlier by Sir Isaac Newton. He held the position for three years, until he manuevered for the new king George IV's brother Augustus Frederick to take his place in 1830. (A politic move indeed!) Two years later, with his health starting to decline, the Reform Act of 1832 gave Davies Gilbert an opportunity to retire from politics. Oxford University awarded him an honorary Doctorate of Civil Law degree, and he was able to focus on his estate. By 1833, Eastbourne's parish had grown to nearly 4,600 acres in size. The following year, his family expanded as his daughter Catherine married John Samuel Enys (another engineer and former high sheriff of Cornwall) in April 1834, but contracted six months later when Davies' daughter Mary Susannah Gilbert died at the age of 18. It was three years to the day later when Davies' first grandchild, John Davies Enys, was born in October 1837.

By this point, Davies himself was 70 years old, but still energetically working on his projects. The following year, he published his *magnum opus*, a four-volume *Parochial History of Cornwall*, drawing on manuscripts in his possession. In 1839, he visited Cornwall again, but it would be the final time he'd see his native soil. As he became fond of saying, "Time has pressed his iron hands upon me."

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Even still, in November 1839, the elderly Davies Gilbert was being lauded as "the father of British science," a role for which he was better remembered than his twenty-eight years in Parliament. At the December 22 meeting of the Penzance Natural History Society, they overwhelmingly voted to ask Davies to become their patron, on the grounds that "in Mr. Gilbert's long, active, honourable, and honoured life, he had presided over many societies, among others the Royal Society, and individuals the highest of rank of any subjects in the empire had felt it an honour to succeed him." The speaker at the meeting who made the resolution "lamented the feeble state of Mr. Gilbert's health, but he trusted it would yet rally, and that we might have the pleasure and honour of seeing him yet often among us."

Mr. Gilbert's health didn't rally. And they didn't have the pleasure and honour of seeing him again. Instead, Davies Gilbert died two days later, at the age of 72. Fittingly for the man who enriched our supply of Christmas carols, his last breath on earth was taken on Christmas Eve, in time for him to spend Christmas beyond the confines of the earth Christ had been born to save. Davies was survived by his wife Mary Ann (who would die five years and four months later), his son John, and his daughters Catherine, Hester, and Ann. Davies missed Hester's wedding by less than two months. In the wake of his demise, Davies Gilbert was remembered as "a gentleman distinguished by his affability of manners, scientific knowledge, and talents as a statesman."

But, as impressive as all those qualities were, it's the Christmas carols he collected that interest us. In a few of those carols that he'd included even in the first edition of his book, Davies Gilbert had found a curious word: *noel*. He gave his opinion, in that same 1822 preface, that *noel* was somehow a corruption of the Old English word *yule*:

> In each of these works [cited for reference] will be found a very curious dissertation on the word *yule*, the name of a pagan festival, which has passed into most European languages to denominate Christmas. The French *noel* is obviously derived from this word, and appears corrupted into "Now Well," when it forms a part of the chorus in the fourth Carol; and perhaps indicates the whole to be a translation.

Gilbert's suggestion, however, was incorrect, as he himself later learned. The word *noel* was originally derived from the Latin word *natalis*, meaning 'birth.' The holiday we know as 'Christmas' (from Old English *Christesmaesse*, literally, "Christ's Mass") was originally called simply "the day of the birth of Christ" – *dies natalis Christi*. Among speakers of languages like Anglo-Norman and Middle French that had descended from Old French, *natalis* changed its pronunciation and spelling to something like *'nael,'* and later *'noel.'* Already in England by the 1100s, we have records of children born or baptized on Christmas being named 'Noel.' Later, *'noel'* became also a general term of celebration (like "huzzah!"), appearing in England in Geoffrey Chaucer's late-1300s *Canterbury Tales* ("and 'nowel' crieth every lusty man"), and being used in France in July 1429 to acclaim Charles VII king ("at the hour that the king was anointed, and also when the crown was placed on his head, all assembled cried out 'Noel!'").

More to the point, though, by the later 1400s, *'noel'* had become a French word applied to joyous folk songs sung at Christmas in French churches. (The first song known to be referred to as a *noel* was the Latin song *Nova Vobis Gaudia*, "I bring you news of great joy." A version from 1533 even includes the refrain: *Noel, Noel iterando, Noel triplicando, Noel, ah, Noel psallite*: "Noel, repeating Noel, tripling Noel, Noel, ah, Noel sing praise!"). In 1767, the year of Davies Gilbert's birth, the German baron Jakob Friedrich von Bielfeld, writing in French, commented: "The *noels* are also spiritual songs that are designed to celebrate the nativity of the Savior of the world. But it must be confessed that the very common use that is made of these noëls, by children who sing them through the streets, in the villages, and on the highways, is an abuse; and moreover, that in these hymns there is frequently a mixture of the sacred and trifling, the edifying and profane, in a manner that does but badly sort with the dignity of the subject."

The English carol "The First Noel" might be as old as the end of the 1400s or start of the 1500s. Given the French roots of 'Noel,' it's no doubt significant that, as the southwest tip of England, Cornwall isn't so far from northwestern France. Some have suggested that "The First Noel" might've been written for a Christmas play in late-medieval Cornwall and just been too catchy to stay put. But its first true publication was by Davies Gilbert in the second expanded edition of his book, under the title "The first Nowel that the Angel did say." Just ten years later, it was included by William Sandys in his 1833 *Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern*. And the rest is history.

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So, then, what is this beloved old Christmas carol saying in its original nine verses? Well, "the first Noel that the angel did say" – that is, the first Christmas song, the first cry of birthday joy, the first 'Huzzah!' in celebration, which the angel ever got to deliver – "was to certain poor shepherds in fields where they lay." This is, of course, referring to Luke 2:8-10: *"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field..., and lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them... and the angel said unto them: Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people."* (Another carol Davies Gilbert collected has the chorus: "Nowel, Nowel, Nowel, Nowel, / Nowel, Nowel, Nowel, / we may rejoice to hear the voice / of the Angel Gabriel," referring to Luke 1:19. Gilbert himself suggests that this was meant to be a carol for the Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist, which is June 24 – confirming the use of 'Nowel'/'Noel' as focused more on a birthday celebration than on Christmas *per se*.)

The first people who got to hear this joyful news, this festive and folksy Christmas song straight from heaven, were "certain poor shepherds." The carol places emphasis on their low class, their distance from the halls of power and the substance of the world and the resources of life. (Another of the carols Davies Gilbert collected says, similarly, that "God sent an angel from heaven so high / to certain poor shepherds in fields where they lie, / and bade them no longer in sorrow to stay, / because that our Saviour was born on this day.") These shepherds no doubt never thought of themselves as special. They're just poor shepherds, spending yet another night at pasture "in fields where they lay, keeping their sheep, / in a cold winter's night that was so deep." The Bible doesn't outright say winter was when Jesus was born, but there are good reasons behind the tradition that put Christmas when in the year it is.

These days, the average low temperature for late December in Bethlehem is around 41 degrees Fahrenheit – not too cold or deep – and Cornwall, for that matter, is only slightly cooler by a couple degrees. It gets a lot colder here than in either Cornwall or Bethlehem on Christmas! So even though the climate was likely cooler there two thousand years ago than it is today, those shepherds probably weren't exactly freezing their noses off. Still, in the carol, we're to imagine them as pitiful figures: alone and restless in the cold night, plunged in a great darkness, wracked by poverty... and then the angel comes and warmly sings a gospel light into their chilly hearts. For "born is the King of Israel!" *"Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord!"* (Luke 2:11).

The story of the Star of Bethlehem comes from Matthew's Gospel, not Luke's, and is seen by the wise men. But here the carol seems to imply that it's the shepherds who "looked up and saw a star / shining in the east beyond them far." (Another of Gilbert's carols says so explicitly: that "this star... did appear unto the shepherds poor.") While the Bible doesn't tell us much about the star Matthew's talking about, the carol imagines that "to the earth it gave great light, / and so it continued both day and night." Ordinarily in the Bible, *"the stars"* are there *"for light by night"* (Jeremiah 31:35), to *"give light on the earth"* (Genesis 1:17). To the carol, this star competes with the sun. (Compare what St. Ignatius says in our 'Quotes for Thought' page this month!)

Only in verse 3 do we actually get the wise men looped into this whole star business. "And by the lightning of that Star" – that is, by the light of that same star, as our rephrased version in our hymnal has it – "there came three wise men from countries far." The Bible doesn't tell us there were three 'wise men,' but that's an inference people made from the three gifts they brought. In the carol's tradition, they also came from "countries far," plural – not all from the same place. Probably they were all diplomats from the Parthian Empire, but some later church traditions imagined that one was from Persia, another was from Arabia or Ethiopia, and a third was from India.

The carol tells us that "to seek a King was their intent, / and to follow the Star wheresoever it went." That's straight out of Matthew 2:1-2: *"There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."* The wise men are looking to pay their respects to the king whose birth is written on the face of heaven – one who (unlike Herod) was *born* to be king of the Jews. And because of their determination, these wise men will follow the star wherever it leads them.

"This star drew nigh to the north west," the carol sings at the start of the fourth verse. Since Bethlehem is a few miles south of Jerusalem, maybe this refers to the position of the star the carolers imagine the wise men would've seen from their eastern homeland, especially if they're thought to be from Arabia, south Persia, and India. That, at least, is my best guess as to the choice of language. *(Continued on Page 14)*

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Right after that, the carol says: "And at Bethlehem Jury she took up her rest." 'Jury' here is an alternate spelling of 'Jewry,' emphasizing that the Bethlehem in question was in the Jewish nation. Another one of the carols which Davies Gilbert collected also referred to "Bethlehem in Jewry." Similarly, yet another of those carols says that when Mary traveled to visit relatives in the Judean hills, she "did to Jury go." Still another one refers, in the same verse, both to "Jewry" and to "Jury land." So this is emphasizing that the wise men's destination was *"in Bethlehem of Judaea"* (Matthew 2:5; cf. 2:1 [*"Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea"*]). The reason the Bible emphasizes this is because there was also another town called Bethlehem in the tribal territory of Zebulun (Joshua 19:15), which is probably where the tribal hero ('judge') Ibzan was from (Judges 12:8-10). That's not the Bethlehem we're talking about here. It's Bethlehem Jury – Bethlehem in Judaea – where the star rests.

"And there she did both stop and stay, / right over the house where the King did lay." The carol here is summing up nicely what it says in Matthew 2:9: that after their meeting with Herod, the wise men left his presence, *"and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was."* Exactly what that looked like – i.e., how a star in the sky can pick out one particular house in a small town where everybody lives so close together – it's hard to picture. But the star, which had been in motion to guide the wise men, reached its destination; it finished its job. It's interesting, by the way, that the carol started out referring to the star as 'it' in verses 2-3, but here in verse 4, it becomes a 'she.' Why do you think that is? Your guess is as good as mine!

Matthew continues telling the story by writing that, when the star had become stationary above one particular house, *"when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy"* (Matthew 2:10). The carol fleshes out the reason why: "Then did they know assuredly / within that house the King did lie." Their quest was over. They had found the One they were seeking. But here the carol slows down the action, imagining that just one of the three wise men went in first, to check the place out: "Then entered in one for to see, / and found the Babe in poverty." This probably has much to do with Luke 2 (*"Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger"*). Just like the carol puts the emphasis on the shepherds being 'poor,' so it (correctly) observes that 'the Babe' was born in poverty – not a great palace. This was a common theme in the carols Gilbert collected: that "the Son of God" was "not born in majesty and state," but rather in the conditions of poverty relatable to the lowest of the low.

Only then, the carolers sing, "entered in these Wise Men three, / most reverently upon their knee." They had, after all, come to worship him, or to do homage to him, they said. "And offered there in his presence / both gold and myrrh and frankincense." That's a nice way to capture in rhyme what Matthew 2:11 says: *"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts: gold, and frankincense, and myrrh."*

The seventh verse returns to the theme of poverty, thus sandwiching the wise men's lavish gifts between the humility of the Lord. "Between an ox-stall and an ass / this Child truly born there was." The rhyme scheme here isn't great – maybe a Cornish accent makes it better, I don't know – but it's common in Christmas tradition to picture an ox and a donkey ('ass') flanking the newborn Christ. As animals used for farm labor, they commonly go together in the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 23:4), and – more relevant here – the Prophet Isaiah uses them as a contrast for wayward Israel's ignorance of God: *"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider"* (Isaiah 1:3). Unsurprisingly, later Christians took this as having a Christmas meaning: while Joseph and Mary's neighbors in Israel (e.g., Herod and the priests) didn't know or consider what had happened, yet at the Nativity, the ox knew his Owner, and the ass knew his Master's crib!

In the carol, "for want of clothing there did him lay / all in an ox-manger amongst the hay." This refers again to the account in Luke: *"She brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn"* (Luke 2:7). (Actually, the word means 'guest room.' There was no space left in the guest room, so Joseph and Mary were in the low part of the house where the family livestock were brought in overnight. The feed trough from which the animals ate hay overnight was the only comfortable place to rest the newborn Child.) This was a common theme in Gilbert's carol collection (for instance: "And when she had swaddled her son so sweet, / within an ox manger she laid him to sleep").

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If verses 1-2 are about the shepherds, and verses 3-7 (or 2-7) are about the wise men, the last two verses are about us. How are we going to respond to the birth of the King? If the angel is going to shout and sing, if the wise men are going to bring offerings of worship, if the star is going to show anyone with eyes to see where to find the Savior, what does this carol ask of us? "Now let us all with one accord / sing praises to our Heavenly Lord!" *"Sing unto God, ye kingdoms of the earth; O sing praises unto the Lord"* (Psalm 68:32). *"Sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein..."* (Isaiah 42:10).

Who is this Heavenly Lord we're supposed to be praising? The One resting in poverty in an ox's feeding trough, swaddled tightly in clothes to give his vulnerable human body stability. And yet it's the same One "which hath made Heaven and Earth from nought." It's *"God the LORD, he that created the heavens and stretched them out, he that spread forth the earth and that which cometh out of it, he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein"* (Isaiah 42:5). The same one wrapped up in a manger, humanly unable to walk or talk, is the God who created the entire universe out of nothing, simply by choosing for it to be. The baby who not long before was attached to Mary by an umbilical cord is the Lord who sustains the angels in being, who gives breath and spirit to all the shepherds and wise men there ever were. The Lord we praise as the Light of the World is far brighter inside, though veiled in an infant's form, than the star that guided the way to him as to its Source.

And, as the eighth verse concludes, this same God, born into human life and wrapped up in poverty and dirt, is the One we now know as our Savior at the greatest cost – the One who "by his blood mankind hath bought." We are *"the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood"* (Acts 20:28), *"in whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins"* (Colossians 1:14). This carol refuses to let us forget that Christmas is the beginning of the saving life of Christ on earth, a salvation accomplished at the cross. In focusing on the sweet themes of birth and blessing, on the gentle domesticity and rustic trappings of that room in Bethlehem, we dare not forget that Christmas points to life *and* death. Christmas happened, at least in part, for the sake of Calvary – for us.

(As an aside, if you look at the original lyrics which Davies Gilbert recorded for this carol, the name of Jesus isn't used even once. He's the Lord, he's the King, he's the Child, he's the Babe. Maybe that's because they didn't feel like coming up with a rhyme. Maybe it's because they understood he didn't get named 'Jesus' until the eighth day, when he was circumcised. Or, more likely, it's just how the words turned out. In any event, it's a clear difference between the original and the version in our hymnal, which has some revisions, one of which substitutes 'Jesus' for 'the King' in verse 4. It's not a bad revision! I just always think it's interesting to see how the words have shifted.)

That brings us to the ninth verse, which I'm betting you've never sung. Having declared our faith that Christ is both Creator and Redeemer, the carol considers our preferred response to the Heavenly Lord we say we believe in. "If we in our lifetime do well," the carol sings. This carol, remember, probably predates the 1500s – it's probably older than the allergy to linking good works and salvation. Here, there's no whiff of the Reformers' suggestion that all of a Christian's works are so deeply tainted with sin as to be disgusting to God. Rather, it is possible, by God's grace, that we can live in a way that pleases God. There is a moral way we ought to live. And *"if ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' ye do well"* (James 2:8).

And if we live that way, if we do well (including doing well in our duties to know and trust and love our Heavenly Lord), then "we shall be free from the pains of hell." 'Hell' – now there's a word you probably don't really expect to encounter in a Christmas carol! But this carol doesn't sugarcoat anything. There is a hell, and its pains are what true justice would give to a life that doesn't 'do well.' If we do well, if we live out the love that God has poured into our hearts through Jesus Christ, then hell has no pains to offer us. So *"learn to do well"* (Isaiah 1:17)!

Instead, "God hath prepared, for us and for all, / a resting-place in general." *"If I go and prepare a place for you,"* says Jesus, *"I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also"* (John 14:3). God has prepared an alternative to the natural fruit of our sins. That alternative is a 'resting-place.' In the desert, God went *"before them,"* in front of and in advance of the Israelites, *"to search out a resting place for them"* (Numbers 10:33). That's what Jesus has done: gone to search out a resting place for those who inherit his salvation, those who cooperate with the grace to do well. And that preparation is what Christmas is all about. Thank God!

Preaching Calendar (December 2023 – January 2024)

Worship services commence at 10:00 AM on Sundays. We hope to see you there with us!

December 3 (Advent 1):
Sermon Title: "The Throne of His Father David"
Scripture Reading: 1 Sam. 16:4-5,11-13 + 2 Sam. 5:1-4,10; 6:17-19
"O Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (87)
"O Jesus, King of Glory" (insert)

December 10 (Advent 2):
Bishop Randall L. Sizemore will be with us to bring the sermon.
Please be prepared to give Bishop Randy a warm welcome!
Sermon Title: "Waiting Well"
Scripture Reading: Matthew 24:36-44
"Of the Father's Love Begotten" (90)
"Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation" (207)

December 17 (Advent 3):
In lieu of the usual structure of our service,
come join us for this year's Christmas cantata!
For more information, see page 4.

December 24 (Advent 4):
Sermon Title: "Tonight's the Night!"
Scripture Reading: Luke 2:1-21
"While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks" (110)
"O Little Town of Bethlehem" (96)

December 31 (Christmas 1):
Sermon Title: "King of All the Years"
Scripture Reading: Psalm 72:1-7, 12-14, 18-19
"Let Us Tune Our Hearts and Voices" (insert)
"Go, Tell It on the Mountain" (107)

January 7 (Epiphany 1):
(Communion Service)
Sermon Title: "Gold, Grain, and Glory"
Scripture Reading: Psalm 72:1-4, 8-11, 15-19
"Eternal Source of Every Joy" (insert)
"We Three Kings of Orient Are" (116)

January 14 (Epiphany 2):
Sermon Title: "Two Trees"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17
"Teach Me Thy Will, O Lord" (381)
"Jesus Calls Us O'er the Tumult" (491)

January 21 (Epiphany 3):
(Congregational Meeting)
Sermon Title: "Lay Hold of Life"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:8-9, 15-17
"Fight the Good Fight with All Thy Might" (458)
"Hail! Tree of Life, Planted Anew" (insert)

January 28 (Septuagesima):
Sermon Title: "Fields of Freedom, Seeds of Doubt"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 2:25–3:5
"I Need Thee Every Hour" (355)
"Trust in the Lord with All Your Heart" (316)

February 4 (Sexagesima):
Sermon Title: "Useful, Pretty, Profitable, Toxic"
Scripture Reading: Genesis 3:1-6
"O Jesus, I Have Promised" (496)
"Do You Love the World?" (insert)

Quotes for Thought

"Our God Jesus Christ was, according to God's plan, conceived by Mary from the seed of David and of the Holy Spirit. … The virginity of Mary and her giving birth... escaped the notice of the ruler of this age..., accomplished in the silence of God. … A star shone in the sky brighter than all other stars, and its brightness was indescribable, and its novelty caused astonishment. … Consequently all magic was dissolved and every bondage of evil disappeared. Ignorance was destroyed and the ancient kingdom was ruined, when God appeared in human form to give us newness of eternal life. What had been prepared by God received a beginning. From then all things were set in commotion because of the plan for the abolition of death."

– St. Ignatius of Antioch

Ephesians 18.2–19.3 (c. AD 107), in William Varner, tr., *The Apostolic Fathers* (T&T Clark, 2023), 147-148

"As the Lord Jesus was made our flesh by being born, so we are made his body by being reborn. Consequently, we are members of Christ and a temple of the Spirit of God. … We ought, then, to celebrate this day of the Lord's Birth with no listless and no worldly joy. Each one of us would do it worthily and with a proper understanding if all remember whose body it is of which they constitute members and whose head it is to which they have been fitted – to prevent any incongruous appendage from being attached to the sacred edifice."

– Pope St. Leo the Great

Sermon 23.5, given 25 December 442, in *Fathers of the Church: A New Translation* 93:91

"Let us joyfully revere this holy day of the blessed birth, on which, through the birth of the Lord, the secrets of the Virgin's womb are revealed … For this Newborn is more resplendent than day, more radiant than light. … He proceeded from the shrine of the body of the Virgin and descended from heaven out of love. … The whole throng of angels shouted with joy because the earth received its Eternal King. Blessed Mary has become a precious temple, for she bore the Lord of Lords. She indeed, for our sins, brought forth the splendid life so that bitter death would be banished. … And, as in those days the faithlessness of Herod feared your [i.e., Christ's] coming in the world, and the godless king disappeared from before the countenance of the Great King, may also the solemn celebrations now in the present time break the bonds of sin."

– Visigothic liturgical prayers for Christmas Day

Gothic Missal 4.13 (c. AD 700), in *Corpus Christianorum in Translation* 27:120-123

"Be prepared, O Israel, to meet the Lord, for he comes. … Brothers, it is now the time of the Lord's advent, in which we should be prepared through some special religious observance. It is the time in which the God-man comes to humankind on behalf of humankind in order to redeem, free, justify, and beatify: to redeem from guilt, free from punishment, justify through grace, and beatify through glory. Therefore, in this so sacred time, we ought to devote ourselves to doing good abundantly by his grace."

– Richard of St. Victor

Sermones Centum 5 (c. AD 1170), in *Victorine Texts in Translation* 8:169

"Come with sincere and earnest hearts to Him who blesses your homes, who sanctifies this festival by his kind presence, who waits to welcome you now to his undying love, and will admit you hereafter to those nobler joys promised even to the youngest disciple. Choose this night whom ye will serve. … Come, and be Christ's true and faithful disciples on earth, and in the great home-gathering – the heavenly Christmas – may not one be wanting to swell the glad song of thanksgiving and gratitude, to Him over whose human birth the angel-choir rejoiced, singing, 'Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good-will towards men!'"

– Charlotte Maria Haven

Christmas Hours (Ticknor and Fields, 1858), 25-26

"Christmas and giving are inseparably linked together. Ever since the magi of old brought their gifts of love and homage to the feet of the Christ child, this spirit has shone forth at this season as at no other time during the year. … Christmas is for everybody, old and young, rich and poor..."

– Mary G. Kroeger

"Christmas Spirit Carries Gladness To Everyone In Lancaster This Yuletide," Lancaster *Sunday News* (23 December 1923): 4

PRAYER GUIDE

- ***We praise God*** **for all the wondrous blessings he's given us, most notably the ministry of his Son (in death, resurrection, and exaltation to the Father's right hand) and the gift of his Holy Spirit; and** ***we pray*** **that God would glorify his name above all else and would bring his kingdom more fully to earth.**
- *We pray for* **our denomination, our congregation, and the church universal**, that God would bless us at all levels with faithfulness, wisdom, vision, and fortitude to earnestly labor in his vineyard.
  - *We pray particularly for* our pastor **Rev. Jonathan J. Brown** and for **our church board**.
  - *We pray also for* **our Evangelical Congregational Church leadership**: our bishop **Randy Sizemore**, executive director **Kevin Henry**, and district field director **Keith Miller**; the **Global Ministries Community** under **Ted Rathman**; the **Kingdom Extension Community** under **Mike Snedeker**; the **Church Health Community** under **Gary Kuehner**; the **Missional Alignment Community** under **Bishop Randy Sizemore**; and the **Ministerial Development Community** under **Matthew Hill**.
- *We pray for* **our missionary partners** (such as **Dan Quigley** and others), that God would keep them safe and faithful, would focus their efforts on God's work, and would grant success in accordance with his holy will.
- *We pray for* **other churches and pastors in our community**, that God would keep all congregations united in one holy faith and devoted to the ardent service of one and the same kingdom and of its King, Jesus.
- *We pray for* the **salvation of our whole community and its maturation in Christian discipleship**, knowing that there is hope in Jesus for all people and for entire communities to reflect the righteous love of God.
- *We pray for* **an end to disease outbreaks:** COVID-19, mpox, cholera, dengue, diphtheria, anthrax, flu, RSV.
- *We pray for* **those suffering in the wake of disasters around the world**, that God would have mercy:
  - *We pray for* those afflicted by natural disasters such as famine; drought; Storm Ciaran in northwest Europe; the snowstorm in Ukraine and Moldova; flooding in Italy, Somalia, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Turkey; avalanches in Iran and Alaska; landslides in Italy; earthquakes in Nepal and the Philippines; etc.
  - *We pray for* those afflicted by accidents such as plane crashes in Austria and Indonesia; train accidents in Indonesia and Illinois; bus/truck accidents in China, India, Nigeria, Washington, and Ohio; other vehicle crashes in Australia and Texas; explosions in Ohio and New York; fires in Iran, England, China, Pakistan, and Kazakhstan; tunnel collapse in India; mine accidents in Suriname, South Africa, Poland, and China.
- *We pray also for* **those victimized by violence and social ills**, especially the Israel-Hamas war and Russian invasion of Ukraine, that God would make his peace manifest to the injured, traumatized, and grieving.
  - *We pray additionally for* those afflicted by the Uyghur genocide in China; civil war in Syria, Somalia, Yemen, Sudan, Myanmar, etc.; the India-Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan, and Armenia-Azerbaijan conflicts; insurgency in Egypt, Colombia, Chad, Cameroon, Congo, the Maghreb, Nigeria, Niger, India, Burkina Faso, Uganda, Mozambique, Pakistan, South Sudan, Turkey, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Peru, and Libya; gang/cartel wars in Mexico, Ecuador, and Haiti; kidnappings; protest-related violence around the world (including the Dublin riots); airstrikes or rocket attacks in Ukraine, Israel, Gaza, Syria, Iraq, Western Sahara, etc.; mass shootings in Nigeria, Sudan, Thailand, Israel, Canada, and Colorado; shootouts in Mexico and elsewhere; stabbings in Ireland and Israel; bombings in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and elsewhere; the vehicle-ramming attack in Indiana; ambushes in Mali and elsewhere; massacres in Cameroon and Sudan; the humanitarian crisis in Gaza; vandalism and attacks on churches; stampedes in Congo and India; the American opioid epidemic; human rights violations (e.g., abortion and human trafficking); the rising wave of antisemitism and other ideologies of hatred; and the refugee crisis.
- *We pray for* all who serve and protect us, including **civic leaders**, **police**, **firefighters**, **medical responders**, and **members of the military**: May God keep them safe, just, wise, sincere, humble, and accountable as they administer justice, guard against chaos, prevent harm, and defend the vulnerable.
- *We pray for* **our nation and its government** at all levels and in all branches, that God would move our leaders to repent of unjust or unmerciful practices and laws; that God would crown them with wisdom, security, peace, and civility toward all; and that God would give them godly hearts to live and govern rightly.
- *We pray for* **the persecutors and maligners of the church around the world**:
  - *We pray for* the conversion of terrorists and other people of violence into disciples of the Prince of Peace.
  - *We pray for* the wisdom of God to be made manifest to skeptics and critics.
  - *We pray for* the Spirit's boldness to fill the hearts of all believers to witness to Jesus in life and in death.

PRAYER GUIDE

- *We pray for* **the families and friends of many who have entered their rest in the past year**, including:
  - For the family of **Earl Pickel**, who entered rest on December 19, 2022.
  - For the family of **David Hurst**, who entered rest on December 22, 2022.
  - For the family of **Letty Clark**, who entered rest on December 25, 2022.
  - For the family of **Bob Forrey**, who entered rest on January 5, 2023.
  - For the family of **Paul Bauman** (Joyce Good's brother), who entered rest on January 6, 2023.
  - For the family of **June Harter** (Sue Eshelman's mother), who entered rest on January 24, 2023.
  - For the family of **Darlene Young**, who entered rest on February 1, 2023.
  - For the family of **Mike Diem**, who entered rest on February 8, 2023.
  - For the family of **Alvin Wise** (Jean Hess' uncle), who entered rest on February 22, 2023.
  - For the family of **Grace Sprecher** (Sharon Mast's aunt), who entered rest on February 22, 2023.
  - For the family of **Herman Martin**, who entered rest on February 25, 2023.
  - For the family of **Leon Hartranft**, who entered rest on March 11, 2023.
  - For the family of **Amanda Hoffert**, who entered rest on March 11, 2023.
  - For the family of **Lois Gift**, who entered rest on March 20, 2023.
  - For the family of **William Riegel** (Del's brother-in-law), who entered rest on March 27, 2023.
  - For the family of **Darryl Imler** (Leroy Stoltzfus' nephew), who entered rest on April 1, 2023.
  - For the family of **Glenn Weber**, who entered rest on April 4, 2023.
  - For the family of **Clarence Jones** (Floyd Mast's uncle), who entered rest on April 11, 2023.
  - For the family of **Linda Wonder** (Sharon Mast's stepmother), who entered rest on April 27, 2023.
  - For the family of **John Herr** (Abby Eberly's friend), who entered rest on April 29, 2023.
  - For the family of **Sherry Stoltzfus** (Esther's sister-in-law's mother), who entered rest on May 4, 2023.
  - For the family of **Jim Brubaker**, who entered rest on May 5, 2023.
  - For the family of **Clarence Bauman** (Joyce Good's brother), who entered rest on June 17, 2023.
  - For the family of **Ben Schweitzer** (Kim Sweigart's son-in-law's friend), who entered rest July 10, 2023.
  - For the family of **Mary Martin** (Abby Eberly's friend's sister), who entered rest on July 15, 2023.
  - For the family of **Ray Snader**, who entered rest on July 17, 2023.
  - For the family of **John Kendig** (Sharon Mast's brother-in-law), who entered rest on July 19, 2023.
  - For the family of **Mary Skiba** (Sally Arment's cousin), who entered rest on August 20, 2023.
  - For the family of **Ivan Zimmerman** (Ray Snader's brother-in-law), who entered rest on August 22, 2023.
  - For the family of **Della Bollinger** (Floyd Mast's aunt), who entered rest on August 27, 2023.
  - For the family of **Harley Steenhoek** (the Walkers' grandpa), who entered rest on September 2, 2023.
  - For the family of **Elsie Martin** (Jean Hess's great-aunt), who entered rest on September 8, 2023.
  - For the family of **Clarence Good** (Jean Hess's uncle), who entered rest on September 13, 2023.
  - For the family of **Luke Ringler** (Abby's son-in-law's brother), who entered rest on September 25, 2023.
  - For the family of **Pat Street** (Nancy Mountz's sister), who entered rest on September 27, 2023.
  - For the family of **Daniel Newswanger** (Mabel's husband), who entered rest on October 8, 2023.
  - For the family of **Joyce Martin** (Jean Hess's cousin), who entered rest on October 11, 2023.
  - For the family of **Shirley Riggins** (Deb Messner's mother), who entered rest on October 13, 2023.
  - For the family of **Titus Burkholder** (Leon Hess's cousin), who entered rest on October 16, 2023.
  - For the family of **Erwin Sensenig Jr.** (Sally Arment's brother), who entered rest on November 7, 2023.
  - For the family of **Henrietta Hoshauer**, who entered rest on November 18, 2023.
  - For the family of **Bob Schade** (Cindy Ruth's uncle), who entered rest on November 23, 2023.
  - For the family of **Harvey Sauder**, who entered rest on November 25, 2023.
  - For the family of **David Kulp**, who entered rest on November 27, 2023.
    - May the Lord give immeasurable peace, strength, and comfort to all who face loss and grief.

PRAYER GUIDE

- *We pray for* **all dementia sufferers** and for **their caretakers**, that God would lighten burdens, restore clarity to injured minds, and speak directly to hearts and souls with his comfort, his peace, and the light of grace.
- *We pray for* **all suffering from cancer** – (including Randy Vandill, Cindy Ebersole, Troy Frey, Lisa Mast, Betty Kennedy [Del Ream's niece-in-law], Earl Martin [Miriam Rissler's brother-in-law], Adrianne Hedges [Brenna Pammer's friend], Donna Rhodes [Pastor Jonathan's aunt], Brandy Rhodes [Pastor Jonathan's cousin], Doris Snader, Gene Sensenig, Rev. Marlin Lafferty, Rev. Don Wert, etc.) – that God shield them from pain, restore their bodies, comfort them, and bless their doctors.
- *We pray for* the **other assorted health concerns (and other needs)** of:
  - Earl and Pauline Good + John Good (Earl's brother) + David Good
  - Floyd Mast + Steven Mast (Floyd's son) + Cindy Bannon + Marilyn Wilson (Cindy's mother)
  - Barry Ream + Delores Jaxel + Clair Kohl + Jeff Kohl + Henry Kohl + Shawn and Candace Sweigart
  - Cherri Snader + Lawrence Groff + Jim Becker + Don Pickle + Dot Yohn
  - Linda Burkholder + Mary Andrews + Raymond Bannon
  - Barty Messner + Edna Binner + Shannon Messner
  - Henrietta Hoshauer + Brandon Wilson + Floyd Heuyard
  - Violet Stauffer + Paul Ford + Lori Zimmerman
  - Jerry Felpel and Doris Getz + Dawn Acevedo (Cindy Hoffer's sister)
  - Josh Kendig (Sharon Mast's son) + Connie Dieter (Leon and Jean Hess's daughter)
  - Larsen Houck (Shirley Good's great-grandson) + Kayley Smith (the Hesses' granddaughter)
  - Kathryn Shirk (Jean Hess's aunt) + Sonya Shirey (Jean's friend) + Dennis Wanner
  - Ray Arment + Butch and Mike Skiba + Emily Sensenig + Jeannine Sensenig
  - Sharon Geib (Deb Kimmel's sister) + Cassie Geib (Sharon Geib's mother-in-law)
  - Veanna Baxter + Julia Reed (Veanna's sister) + Shirley Buchanan
  - Jeremy Kurman + Warren Weinhold + Jody Freeman
  - Jess Pennepacker + Charles Yingst + Ralph Mountz
  - Carl and Grace Nolt + Vera Kochel + Carl Martin
  - Robert and Barbara Sparr + Rodger Whittaker
  - Abby Eberly + Linda Sweitzer (Abby's friend)
  - Elizabeth Zimmerman (John Eberly's sister)
  - Dorothy Long (Sharon Mast's boss's sister)
  - Madelynne Walker + Ben + Tim + Minerva Hufford
  - Troy Frey and both of his parents + Tory Lingg
  - Ken Keen and Nancy Fox (Floyd Mast's friends)
  - Donna Sensenig + Larry Sensenig + Daryll Sensenig
  - Bob Buckwalter (Abby Eberly's friend's husband)
  - Alice Vidzicki (Deb Kimmel's friend's mother)
  - Delores, Jeremiah, and Bobby Snader + Ben Doullin + Shirley Sweigart
  - Carol Briggs (Ruth Snader's sister) + Ken Cochran (Ruth's cousin-in-law)
  - Linda Talbot (Cindy Ruth's sister) + Tom Schwer (Sharon Mast's stepbrother)
  - Cathy Bullock (Cindy Ruth's neighbor) + Ken Styer + Bret Hoffert + Jethro Hursh
  - Rebecca Lucas (the Walkers' family friend) + Rebecca Horst + Dillon Dewire + Barb Kern
  - Linda Ebert (Barb's friend) + the Bowmans (Barb's cousins) + Danielle (Barb's grandson's girlfriend)
- *We pray for* **other neighbors, friends, and believers in need**, that God would heal, provide, and comfort.
- *We pray for* **a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit** upon our church, our community, our county, our nation, the Evangelical Congregational Church, and the church universal. *We pray for* the whole church to be filled with a spiritual zeal for worship, evangelism, and discipleship. **May the fires of revival fall!**
- ***We praise God* for all the prayers we've seen him answer and for his everlasting faithfulness!**